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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 002186

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER DISPUTE: THAI ARMY ASSESSES
NO REDUCTION IN CAMBODIAN TROOPS AT PREAH VIHEAR

Classified By: Political Counselor George P. Kent, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Thai and Cambodian press reports over the past week indicated that Cambodia would reduce the number of troops in the Preah Vihear area after Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen August 22 announced a troop reduction, possibly by much as fifty percent. Hun Sen's announcement preceded a visit by Thai Chief of Defense Forces General Songkitti Jaggabatara to Cambodia that included a meeting with Cambodian armed forces leader Pol Sarouen. Songkitti was reported to have said that there would be no more problems between Thailand and Cambodia after his meetings in Phnom Penh.

¶2. (C) At this point it is unclear whether the reduction, if true, would apply to the number of troops within the temple grounds (reported to be about 10 on each side), troops located in the disputed territory, or to the larger numbers in the vicinity of the disputed territory. While estimates of troops numbers vary, Colonel Werachon Sukondhapatipak, Director of the Royal Thai Army's Foreign Liaison Division, had told us earlier that Thailand had 3,000 troops in the area and that the RTA assessed Cambodia to have approximately 5,000 troops in the vicinity of the disputed territory.

¶3. (C) Colonel Saranyu Viriyavejakul, Aide de Camp to RTA Commander General Anupong Paochinda, told us late August 28 that the RTA had not observed any troop reduction on the Cambodian side. Thai Army observations from the disputed area were that Cambodian troops had shifted positions in and around the disputed territory, but that there had been no change in the number of Cambodian troops. Saranyu told us that the RTA believed that Cambodian statements over the past week were posturing in regard to a deadline imposed by the World Heritage Committee for Phnom Penh to institute an International Coordinating Committee for the Preah Vihear temple. The original deadline for establishing the Committee was February 2009 but Cambodia had received an extension. The RTA believed Phnom Penh would miss the deadline again and was trying to make public statements of troop withdrawals to garner support from the international community, Saranyu said.

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